



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Sunburn

What is sunburn?	<p>There is no such thing as a safe tan. A sunburn is the most familiar and immediate effect of ultraviolet radiation on the skin. It is an inflammation caused by an increase in blood-flow beneath the skin. Repeated exposure to the sun's ultraviolet radiation also eventually causes skin damage similar to the aging process. Patches of skin become thin and less elastic, and develop blemishes, sun freckles, and wrinkles. These changes may take many years of exposure but when they occur, the damage is irreversible. Plus, according to the CDC, 90% of all skin cancers can be attributed to the sun, and a single severe sunburn may increase an individual's risk of skin cancer.</p> <p>The sun produces different types of ultraviolet (UV) radiation which can penetrate skin and cause cell damage. Ultraviolet B (UVB) is a key cause of sunburn and other skin damage. It varies in intensity depending on the time of day, the time of year and the geographic proximity to the equator. This means that the time between 10AM – 2PM is when the sun is at it's highest intensity. It also means that because here in the Charleston, SC area we are in the Southern part of the US that we are closer to the equator, which also means a higher sun intensity than many other areas of the country.</p>
What are the symptoms?	<p>Sunburn results in painful, reddened skin. Severe sunburn may produce swelling and blisters. Symptoms may begin as soon as one hour after exposure and typically reach their peak after one day. Some severely sunburned people develop a fever, chills, weakness and on rare occasions go into shock.</p>
How is sunburn treated?	<p>Treat a sunburn the way you would treat any other burn. Do not cover it with thick salves or thick moisturizers. These will trap the heat and cause more damage. Get the skin in contact with cool (not cold or icy) water or pure aloe vera immediately. Then keep applying the cool water or pure aloe vera on and off for several hours. You may also want to take an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory, such as aspirin, to reduce pain and swelling. If you are unsure what to take, consult your physician.</p>
What can be done to prevent sunburn and skin cancer?	<p>Try to avoid two kinds of exposure: 1) The kind of constant day-to-day exposure; 2) Less-frequent but more intense exposure that causes sun burn. Vacationers and others who get intense sun exposure a few times a year may be at high risk for malignant melanoma.</p> <p>You should always wear sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 that protects from both UVA and UVB rays (Broad spectrum). Apply sunscreen thickly, a thin coat is not very effective. The sun's UV rays can damage your skin in as little as 15 minutes. Put sunscreen on before you go outside, even on slightly cloudy or cool days. Don't forget to put a thick layer on all parts of exposed skin. Get help for hard-to-reach places like your back. Sunscreen wears off. Put it on again if you stay out in the sun for more than 2 hours, and after you swim or do things that make you sweat.</p> <p>Seek shade. When you're outdoors, trees, beach umbrellas, or tents are good sources of shade. Shield your skin. it's important to shield your skin. A shirt, beach cover-up, or pants with a tight weave are all good choices for cover. Keep in mind, however, that a typical T-shirt usually has an SPF that is much lower than the recommended SPF 15. So add some shade or sunscreen — especially if your clothes don't completely cover your skin.</p> <p>Eyes are especially sensitive to injury from UV radiation, so use sunglasses with 100% UV protection. Wear a hat with a brim and use lip balm with at least an SPF of 15</p>

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

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Public Health Office • 4050 Bridge View Drive • Suite 600 • N. Charleston, SC 29405 • Phone: (843) 746-3800 • www.scdhec.gov